STATEMENT BY H.E. LYONPO (DR.) TANDI DORJI
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN
75TH COMMISSION SESSION OF UN-ESCAP
27-31 MAY 2019
Your Excellency, Mr. Damdin Tsogtbaatar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia and Chair of the 75th Session,
Your Excellency, Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of UN-ESCAP,
Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

May I begin by warmly congratulating Your Excellency Mr. Tsogtbaatar on your election as the Chair of the 75th Session. I assure Your Excellency of my delegation's full cooperation for the success of our deliberation.

I would like to thank Her Excellency Ms. Hilda C. Heine, President of the Republic of Marshall Islands and the outgoing Chair for her stewardship and guidance to the work of the 74th Session.

I extend my felicitations to Your Excellency Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, on your appointment as the Executive Secretary of UN-ESCAP. Bhutan considers the mandate of UN-ESCAP indispensable in advancing the socio-economic agenda of our region and we look forward to working very closely with you.

Excellencies,

The 74th Commission deliberated on the theme “Inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. A singular message which emerged then was the unprecedented socio-economic growth of the region which directly translated to lifting millions out of poverty. However, more than 800 million people in our region still live in a state of deprivation from basic livelihood. We had also agreed that if we are to achieve the 2030 Agenda, economic growth alone is not a panacea to the challenges of inequality within and among the countries. It is widely acknowledged that to reduce various forms of inequality, national policies and programmes should be universal with greater attention to the needs of the disadvantaged and the marginalized.

In this regard, my delegation welcomes our debate on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality” during this Session. Further, the theme is a compelling reminder of how the gains of economic growth have not been shared equally in our respective national settings. This notion is corroborated by the UN-ESCAP’s theme study report “Closing the Gap: Empowerment and Inclusion in the Asia and the Pacific”. The report confirms that national averages can be misleading.
Rather, many countries in our region have experienced widening of income inequalities, including my own country – Bhutan.

Clearly, our national policies have not been adequate to promote an inclusive society. Further global actions affecting capacities of national governments to address issues such as climate change have been ineffective. Such a revelation calls for a greater sense of urgency. Our journey to 2030 requires immediate and accelerated action including stronger partnerships between stakeholders at all levels to drive the implementation of the SDGs. Above all it requires increased political commitment and greater national ownership.

Excellencies,

Bhutan presented its Voluntary National Report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the High-Level Political Forum in July 2018. I am pleased to report that Bhutan is well on track to achieve most of the SDGs. The Royal Government adopted measures to create ownership of the SDGs soon after their adoption in September 2015. The 16 National Key Result Areas of the 12th FYP are aligned to the 17 SDGs. Recognizing the importance of ensuring participation and inclusiveness in aligning the national goals to SDGs, the Royal Government carried out numerous sensitization and awareness programs nationwide.

Bhutan has achieved considerable socio-economic progress, including significant reduction in the incidences of poverty. However, we are mindful of the growing income inequality. Under the overarching goal of “narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor”, the Royal Government is committed to reducing all forms of inequalities including income. We are working towards creation of an equitable and inclusive society through targeted interventions such as provision of “one job for one household”, undertaking tax reform, increasing the minimum wage, building more affordable housing among others. The Royal Government is also initiating reforms in health and education sector to enhance greater access to quality services for all.

Excellencies,

Bhutan will be graduating from the category of LDC by December 2023. I must add here that Bhutan will be the first land-locked country to graduate. The process of Bhutan’s transition to a lower middle income country is taking place against the backdrop of severe geographic and structural impediments. Climate change and resulting natural disasters pose the biggest challenge to small developing economies like Bhutan.

Therefore, strengthening the fundamentals of our economy and enhancing the resilience of vulnerable countries to climate change for a sustainable graduation is
imperative. Sustainable graduation and effective implementation of the SDGs are contingent upon availability of adequate and timely resources, and having in place effective institutions supported by quality data and information. Our national priority is to ensure that our hard-earned developmental gains are not derailed by the perils of climate change and natural disaster and to build a resilient and sustainable society. Therefore, issues such as climate change which will impede the sustainable development of vulnerable countries like Bhutan must come to the fore of global discourse including urgent global action.

Excellencies,

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Executive Secretary and the officials of the UNESCAP for the work they have been doing to improve the socio-economic conditions and greater economic integration of our region. However, I would call on UN-ESCAP to look at addressing the special needs of graduating countries like Bhutan, such as through extending enhanced transition support measures.

In closing, I would like to place on record Bhutan’s appreciation for the constant endeavor of the ESCAP Secretariat and its regional centers to realize the hopes and aspirations of over 4 billion people of the Asia-Pacific Region for a brighter, more sustainable and a happier future. I thank Madam Executive Secretary and her efficient team for the excellent arrangements and wish the 75th session success.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!